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Legal expertise in professional construction periodicals: the Belgian building sector shaping and shaped by processes of juridification, 1918-1940

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Abstract: From the beginning of the 20th century onward, the construction sector in Belgium and beyond underwent a process of juridification, with a steep increase in building regulations. As legislation became ever more detailed and elaborate, law increasingly pervaded the construction sector in unprecedented ways. Nevertheless, the multitude of actors most directly touched by this growing legislative complexity – from architects and engineers, to contractors and suppliers – rarely received any legal training. Although the dissemination of legal knowledge thus became critical for the building sector, the ways in which such vital expertise circulated has received limited scholarly attention. This paper analyses three professional periodicals published during the interbellum, and the far-reaching roles the professional press played during these processes of juridification. We argue that through their magazines, the editorial boards went beyond the mere communication of construction law or the simple spreading of information on emerging good practices, novel technical standards, building certification and state legislation. They also coproduced construction law, through active development of legal expertise, lobby work, and strategic manoeuvring within the legal landscape. Lastly, they also sought to claim construction law. With the juridification of the building sector, an expanding legal market emerged which even non-legally trained building actors such as architects and editorial boards strategically banked on by developing professional legal services and support.

Introduction

Until the beginning of the 20th century, the construction sector in Belgium knew very limited regulation. On-site safety measures were practically non-existent, every layperson was allowed to apply for a building permit, which community councils often handed out with limited scrutiny, building techniques and materials were neither checked nor standardized, and anyone was free to claim the title of architect, resulting in widespread concerns for quality guarantees. From the turn of the century onwards, however, building legislation started developing at a staggering pace, from labor protection laws in 1898, new building permits protocols in 1915, war reconstruction decrees in 1919, adjusted building tax codes in the same year, co-ownership laws facilitating high-rise housing construction in 1924, the emergence of regulated construction standards throughout the 1920s, to the professional protection of architects and engineers at the end of the 1930s.

In a few decades, Belgian building legislation had—just as in many other European countries (Carvais 2012)—truly exploded, impacting building activities in unprecedented ways. This process of "juridification", or the "proliferation of law" (Habermas 1987, 357), occurred across nearly all domains of society, yet took on particular dynamics in the construction sector, which was characterized by an intricate interplay between complex technical expertise, and a multitude of professional actors. From architects and engineers to contractors and suppliers, it was the professional actors who came most directly into contact with this growing legislative framework, who had often received little to no legal education. As a result, the dissemination of legal knowledge quickly became a critical matter, not only for individual companies and professional branches, but also for the building sector as a whole.

Nevertheless, the ways in which such vital expertise circulated to the wide array of construction actors have received limited scholarly attention. This paper offers a first exploration of this question, by investigating the undocumented and surprisingly active role Belgian professional periodicals played in the dissemination of legal know-how. We focus on the interbellum, and on three particular magazines published during this period. Firstly, *La Technique des Travaux* (1925-1977) was a biweekly published by the *Compagnie Internationale des Pieux Franki,* a construction company specialized in an innovative pile foundation system. Perhaps because of the commercial aims of the periodical, its editorial board has remained anonymous, consisting of in-house engineers and architects. The periodical undeniably served a publicity purpose, yet was also a "leading journal" (Van de Voorde 2009, 1459), offering a valuable source of information to Belgian architects, contractors, and, most of all, engineers. Secondly, *L'Emulation* (1874-1939) was the long-standing monthly journal of the architectural professional organization S*ociété Centrale d'Architecture de Belgique* (Martiny 1974), which functioned as its editorial board and mainly targeted an audience of architects. Lastly, *Bouwkroniek* (1921-…), published and edited by unknown members of the sectorial organization *Chronicles of the Building Industry*, which sought to improve the Belgian building economy as a whole. As such, it predominantly targeted building contractors and suppliers as a weekly announcement bulletin for public and private construction tenders (Van de Voorde 2011, 165).

Nevertheless, with its recurring opinion pieces and the latest construction-related news, it also spoke to a broader audience (Van de Voorde 2011). Tracing the figures within these often editorial boards and such commercial, professional or sectorial organizations often proves challenging. These actors often published anonymously, or even used aliases, and few archival documentation of these magazines or organiations remains. Their periodicals, however, offer a way to read "against the archival grain", and nevertheless gain insight in the various and far-reaching ways in which such firms, *Sociétés* or institutions still sought to shape the legal framework of their sector (Stoler 2009).

While architectural and construction historians have studied contemporary periodicals such as these and others to a substantial degree (Jannière and Vanlaethem 2008), legal rubrics or law-related articles often seem the first to be skimmed over as if of secondary importance. Nevertheless, we argue that with those pieces these periodicals played a crucial but complex role within the juridification of the construction sector, not only by *communicating*, but also by *coproducing* and even *claiming* construction law. Firstly, these publications offered a prime outlet for the communication of good practices, novel technical standards, building certification and state legislation to the many legally untrained audiences of the construction sector. Yet these periodicals and their editorial board went beyond passively disseminating decrees and regulations spelled out by state legislators. Indeed, and secondly, they also provided an arena where engineers, architects, contractors, and others, actively expressed sometimes conflicting views on how new building legislation should take shape, thereby weighing on, and coproducing law-making processes. Thirdly, with the juridification of the building sector, an increasingly lucrative legal market emerged, not only for law practitioners, but even for regular building actors. On the one hand, constructionlawyers and notaries law used these periodicals to claim their stake in this untapped market, publishing seemingly informative pieces that in fact predominantly sought to serve as advertisement and branding. On the other hand, zooming in on the case of professional organizations such as the S*ociété Centrale d'Architecture de Belgique* reveals how such actors developed legal in-house expertise, offered legal support and services to its members, and developed internal settlement courts that bypassed what they disclaimed as the more sluggish official court procedures.

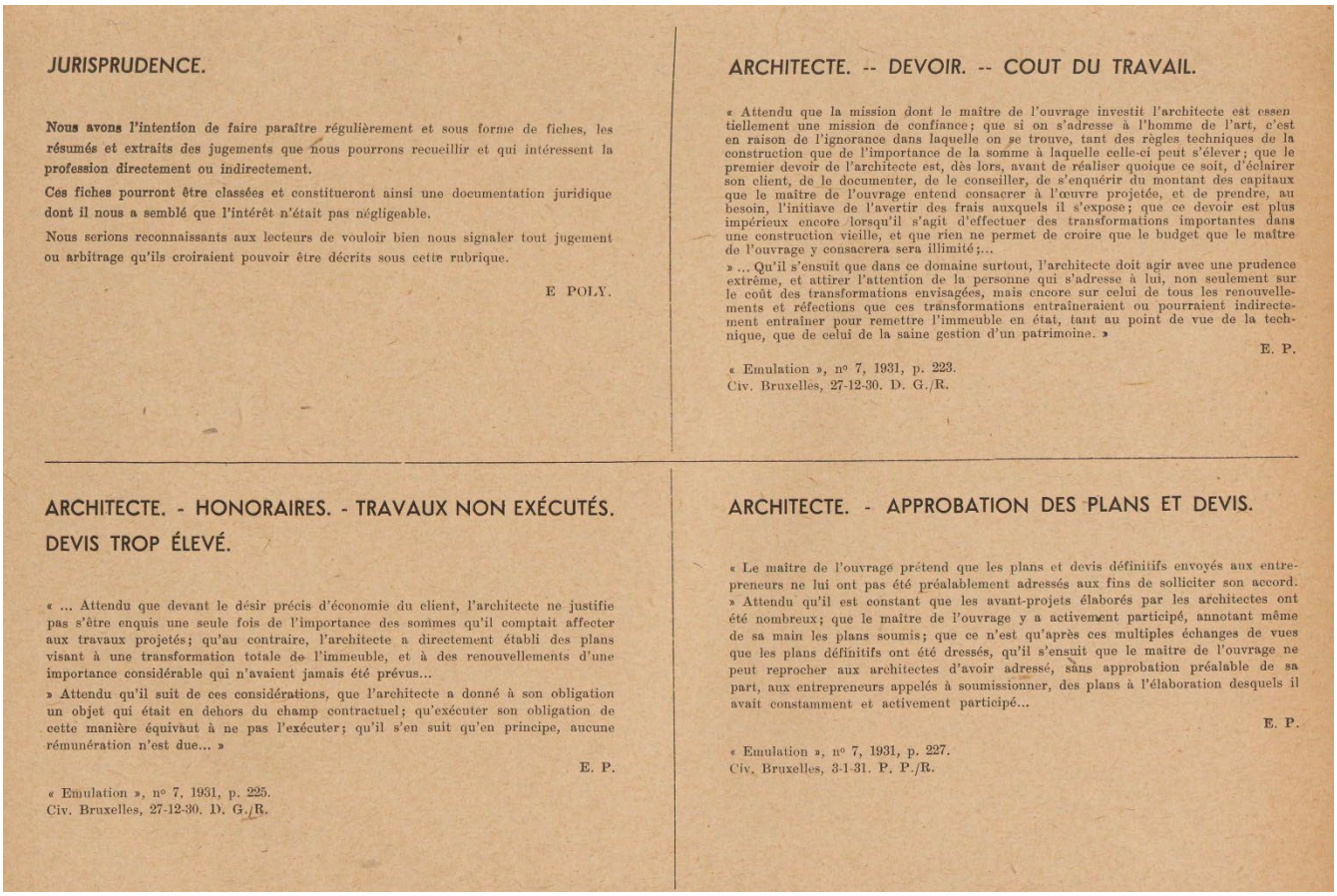
1. Communicating construction law

The first and most straightforward role the professional press played within the juridification of the construction sector was that of legal communication. Each of the three magazines not only published several opinion pieces and full-read articles about the most recent regulations or pending law proposals, but also a recurring rubric explicitly and exclusively devoted to law-related issues. As such, it seems that even for these technical professional journals, legal communication was considered a core function, by both the editorial board and the readership. The content and format of these rubrics, moreover, seems to have been tailored to each specific target audience, allowing the different building actors to efficiently find answers to their legal questions in the outlets most familiar to them.

Bouwkroniek offered a weekly legal section entitled "Rechtskundige Brievenbus" or "Jurisprudential Mailbox". While the most important new rules and regulations were directly explained in specifically designated articles or separate, more lengthy opinion pieces, the magazine's main channel of legal communication came in the form of a Q&A page. Here, the most topical reader questions were directly answered by the periodical's in-house lawyers. As such, the legal knowledge communicated by the periodical directly reflected the interests of its readership, which consisted of architects, engineers or suppliers, and especially contractors. As a result, more than in the other periodicals, many of the issues discussed were fairly hands-on, such as regulations about how to measure, estimate or rebuild separation walls, how to position windows in accordance to local lights and views ordonnances, or which cement composition to use.

If *Bouwkroniek* highlighted the legal framework of on-site building practices, *La Technique des Travaux,* predominantly written for engineers, took a more (techno)scientific approach to legal issues. The periodical had an extensive bibliographical annex with multiple references to legal publications, as well as a recurring rubric on law—a long-read by the in-house lawyers on particular legal topics such as copyright and patents, public tender protocols or building specifications (Fourgeur 1926a; 1926b; D. 1926). Nevertheless, for unknown reasons the editorial board decided to slowly replace the legal section with more construction-specific publications by the end of the 1920s. *La Technique des Travaux* featured a wide range of technical stipulations, for example on hygienic material use in public medical facilities (e.g. Dedoyard 1934) or in depth explanations of regulations regarding sample taking and parastatal organizations ensuring on-site quality control (Dutron 1928). Of particular importance were the several publications on the emerging guidelines on reinforced concrete approved by the Belgian state. These "Instructions relatives aux ouvrages en béton armé [Instructions on reinforced concrete works]" had, in fact, first been published in another professional periodical, the *Bulletin du Comité Central Industriel de Belgique* (Van de Voorde 2011, 122), but were widely circulated, discussed and refined by other journals such as *La Technique des Travaux* (Campus 1926; Karman 1927).

L'Emulation perhaps most prominently featured law-related topics, as the journal served as the mouthpiece of the leading professional organization for architects in the country, which upheld the explicit ambition to defend the profession's legal interests. In its legal rubric "Jurisprudence" its team of in-house lawyers and specialists not only published and discussed the latest regulations in Belgium and beyond, but also the conclusions of the most recent relevant court cases. These ranged from fairly mundane civil disputes regarding shared walls, to tribunal decisions regarding the professional and deontological responsibilities of architects, or, most prominently, the profession's honorarium, which we'll discuss in more detail below. From 1932 onwards, it also launched a system of index cards in handy format, which contained summarized thematic jurisprudence and which the readers could collect to build their own legal inventory [Figure 1]. Lastly, the magazine's editorial board, comprised of several of the most prominent members of the Belgian architectural scene, published multiple legal opinion pieces.



JURISPRUDENCE.

Nous avons l'intention de faire paraître régulièrement et sous forme de fiches, les résumés et extraits des jugements que nous pourrons recueillir et qui intéressent la profession directement ou indirectement.

Ces fiches pourront être classées et constitueront ainsi une documentation juridique dont il nous a semblé que l'intérêt n'était pas négligeable.

Nous serions reconnaissants aux lecteurs de vouloir bien nous signaler tout jugement ou arbitrage qu'ils croiraient pouvoir être décrits sous cette rubrique.

E. POLY.

ARCHITECTE. -- DEVOIR. -- COUT DU TRAVAIL.

« Attendu que la mission dont le maître de l'ouvrage investit l'architecte est essentiellement une mission de confiance; que si on s'adresse à l'homme de l'art, c'est en raison de l'ignorance dans laquelle on se trouve, tant des règles techniques de la construction que de l'importance de la somme à laquelle celle-ci peut s'élever; que le premier devoir de l'architecte est, dès lors, avant de réaliser quoique ce soit, d'éclairer son client, de le documenter, de le conseiller, de s'enquérir du montant des capitaux que le maître de l'ouvrage entend consacrer à l'œuvre projetée, et de prendre, au besoin, l'initiave de l'avertir des frais auxquels il s'expose; que ce devoir est plus impérieux encore lorsqu'il s'agit d'effectuer des transformations importantes dans une construction vieille, et que rien ne permet de croire que le budget que le maître de l'ouvrage y consacrera sera illimité;...

» ... Qu'il s'ensuit que dans ce domaine surtout, l'architecte doit agir avec une prudence extrême, et attirer l'attention de la personne qui s'adresse à lui, non seulement sur le coût des transformations envisagées, mais encore sur celui de tous les renouvellements et réfections que ces transformations entraîneraient ou pourraient indirectement entraîner pour remettre l'immeuble en état, tant au point de vue de la technique, que de celui de la saine gestion d'un patrimoine. »

E. P.

« Emulation », nº 7, 1931, p. 223.
Civ. Bruxelles, 27-12-30. D. G./R.

ARCHITECTE. - HONORAIRES. - TRAVAUX NON EXÉCUTÉS. DEVIS TROP ÉLEVÉ.

« ... Attendu que devant le désir précis d'économie du client, l'architecte ne justifie pas s'être enquis une seule fois de l'importance des sommes qu'il comptait affecter aux travaux projetés; qu'au contraire, l'architecte a directement établi des plans visant à une transformation totale de l'immeuble, et à des renouvellements d'une importance considérable qui n'avaient jamais été prévus...

» Attendu qu'il suit de ces considérations, que l'architecte a donné à son obligation un objet qui était en dehors du champ contractuel; qu'exécuter son obligation de cette manière équivaut à ne pas l'exécuter; qu'il s'en suit qu'en principe, aucune rémunération n'est due... »

E. P.

« Emulation », nº 7, 1931, p. 225.
Civ. Bruxelles, 27-12-30. D. G./R.

ARCHITECTE. - APPROBATION DES PLANS ET DEVIS.

« Le maître de l'ouvrage prétend que les plans et devis définitifs envoyés aux entrepreneurs ne lui ont pas été préalablement adressés aux fins de solliciter son accord.

» Attendu qu'il est constant que les avant-projets élaborés par les architectes ont été nombreux; que le maître de l'ouvrage y a activement participé, annotant même de sa main les plans soumis; que ce n'est qu'après ces multiples échanges de vues que les plans définitifs ont été dressés, qu'il s'ensuit que le maître de l'ouvrage ne peut reprocher aux architectes d'avoir adressé, sans approbation préalable de sa part, aux entrepreneurs appelés à soumissionner, des plans à l'élaboration desquels il avait constamment et activement participé...

E. P.

« Emulation », nº 7, 1931, p. 227.
Civ. Bruxelles, 3-1-31. P. P./R.

Figure 1. First jurisprudential "Index Cards" published in L'Emulation 52(1): I, 1932.

Instead of discussing a wide range of issues, *L'Emulation* clearly focused their efforts on a few spearhead topics most urgent to the architectural profession, including legal protection of the professional title, standardized education, and improved pay scales. Just as the construction guidelines in *La Technique des Travaux,* or the opinion pieces in *Bouwkroniek*, these articles bridged the often fine gap between mere communication of recent construction laws, and the explicit aim to impact and coproduce the very legal framework they were reporting on.

2. Coproducing construction law

After more than two decades of campaigning, laws for the protection of the professional title of architect was finally approved in 1939. These marked possibly the most important milestones in the legal history of Belgium's construction sector, and they have certainly been the most widely studied. Legal historians and building law specialists have, of course, focused on this turning point (e.g. Crals and Vereeck 2005), but these laws have equally received increasing attention from architectural and construction historians (Heindryckx, Devos, and Bulckaen 2021; Vandeweghe 2011; Dobbels, Bertels, and Wouters 2017a). Of particular interest here is the analysis of Bulckaen and Devos (2023), who have traced the extensive and intricate discussions that preceded the architect's law within multiple Belgian engineering and architectural magazines, including *La Technique des Travaux* and *L'Emulation.* Because of the selection of these periodicals, their study mainly focuses on the voices of architects and engineers, who aimed to abolish what they considered "malpractices of the many 'charlatans'" active in the sector. With this, they mainly targeted so-called "architect-contractors"—entrepreneurs who combined construction with architectural tasks, and who ranged from unschooled contractors, to realtors and project developers and engineers (Heindryckx 2023). In these journals, multiple architects voiced genuine and sometimes justified concerns about the ruthless profit-chasing by these "incompetents", which would come with constructional errors and low-quality designs. At the same time, several opinion pieces and reader's letters in *Bouwkroniek* shed light on the equally relevant, yet understudied voices of contractors in these public debates, who feared and condemned the "monopoly" architects and engineers were attempting to claim in the building market (*Bouwkroniek*, 1924). These different points of view in the run-up to this pivotal law undeniably demand further and more in-depth analysis. Nevertheless, these discussions and the previous study of Bulckaen and Devos (2023) clearly highlight how the professional press could impact public debates regarding building legislation and shape the ensuing legislative texts.

Various authors have already noted the crucial part periodicals played in the professionalization and demarcation of the various occupational profiles of general contractors, architects, and engineers (Dobbels, Bertels, and Wouters 2017b; Linssen and De Jonghe 2013). Building on these publications, however, we argue that such narratives of professional demarcation cannot fully explain the surprisingly substantial legal role some of these periodicals played, be it at the explicit forefront, or behind the scenes.

Indeed, legitimately exerting such active role already demanded an intimate knowledge of construction law. All three periodicals made explicit efforts to build out such legal

expertise. *La Technique des Travaux* developed close ties with the influential Liège-based lawyer Paul Fourgeur, who held an important position as the responsible for the interior codes of conduct of the region's Bar. *Bouwkroniek* went even further. It initially brought in two resident legal specialists, whose identity or external careers are unfortunately hard to trace. By the end of the 1920s, however, the editorial board brought in a much more renowned figure as legal respondent. While this was likely in response to the continued success of its "Jurisprudential Mailbox", it perhaps also signals an awareness of the sectorial building organization *Chronicles of the Building Industry* of the increasing juridification of its sector, and the responsabilities it held in coproducing such legal framework. Apart from his noteworthy poetic publications, André Rodenbach was a renowned lawyer who would later also publish in other contractor journals such as *De Aannemer* (Dobbels, Bertels, and Wouters 2017b, 29). With three attached legal specialists, and as the weekly reader questions regarding building law continuously poured in, it seems *Bouwkroniek* had convincingly asserted its legal expertise within the field, which may have lent additional credibility to its legal opinion pieces.

Yet as the voice of the largest professional organization for architects in Belgium, *L'Emulation* and its editorial board undeniably went to the greatest lengths in developing its legal expertise, and deploying it to shape building legislation. The *Société Centrale d'Architecture de Belgique* was comprised of several specialized "Committees", and already in 1891 it had founded a *Comité de Défense Juridique* (Martiny 1974, 52). This body quickly counted some of the most knowledgeable experts on building legislation among its ranks. These not only included architects such as Gustave Maukels, a founding member of the *Société*, a successful designer, and a professor of building law at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Brussels (Nevejans 2011). The Committee also contacted several renowned lawyers from the Brussels region, including Henri Botson, president of the capital's Bar Council (Coppein and De Brouwer 2012, 133–86), and Jean Delvaux (1923), well-known author of several doctrinal works. This expertise proved crucial, as *L'Emulation* and the *Société* became central actors in the lengthy public debates leading up to the eventual professional protection of architects in 1939. However, the *Société*'s lobby work for professionalization initially proved rather unsuccessful. Through repeated opinion pieces, Maukels and colleagues had already started advocating for the establishment of such legal framework as early as 1921 (Bulckaen and Devos 2023; Maukels 1921). In these articles, the editorial board, comprised of members of the *Société* such as Gustave Maukels, even explicitly published their own law proposals and called out the Minister of Science and Arts for not properly accommodating the *Comité de Défense Juridique* and their legal suggestions. Still, these efforts were to no avail, and the architectural Society would have to wait another two decades before they saw their lobby work rewarded.

Where the *Société* was initially failing in their struggle for professional protection, its attempts to ensure Belgian architects with improved pay scales did bear fruit, and reveals the Committee's deep insight into how to deploy the intricacies of Napoleonic and Belgian law systems to its advantage. At the beginning of the First World War, the legal

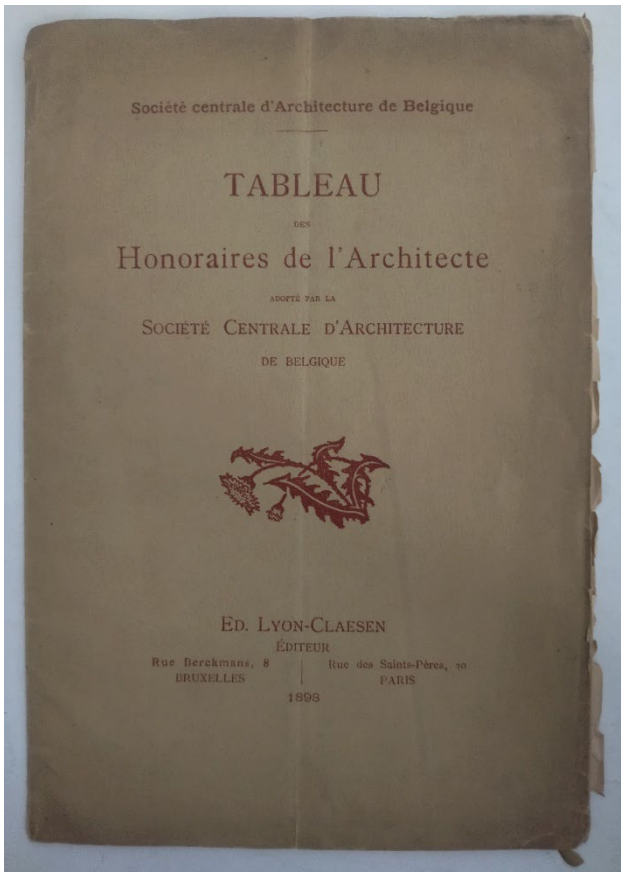


Figure 2. First pay scales published by the Société Centrale d'Architecture en Belgique (1898)

framework for the honorarium of architects was still rooted in French legislation of the early nineteenth century. Although these Napoleonic rulings were originally binding for public buildings only, the Belgian courts quickly applied these to all construction activities (Carvais 2023, 133). According to the legislation, client and architect could agree to any fee, if explicitly stipulated in a contract. However, if disputes occurred and no written record of an honorarium existed, the court was to fall back on the so-called principle of "usages" in contractual law: unwritten customs that were inherently considered part of a contract, even without explicit mention. For architect's fees, such customary pay scale had been established in French law on 1 February 1800. It was capped at five percent, and the direction of on-site construction was remunerated more than the earlier, often more creative phases such as the preliminary design, or the building permit with the final plans.

The peculiarity of the "usage" principle is that while customs can become self-reinforcing when they get reconfirmed again and again in court decisions, they can also prove surprisingly easy to overturn. "Usages" remain unwritten and unfixed, and what can thus be legally judged as custom can quickly be reshaped by what the "epistemic community", often influenced and represented by the professional press, considers as customary (Haas 1992, 1). Although far from easy to replace a "usage" that had been in sway for more than a century, this is precisely what the *Comité de Défense Juridique* achieved, by strategically deploying the power of its media outlet, its legal expertise, and its central position within the architectural community.

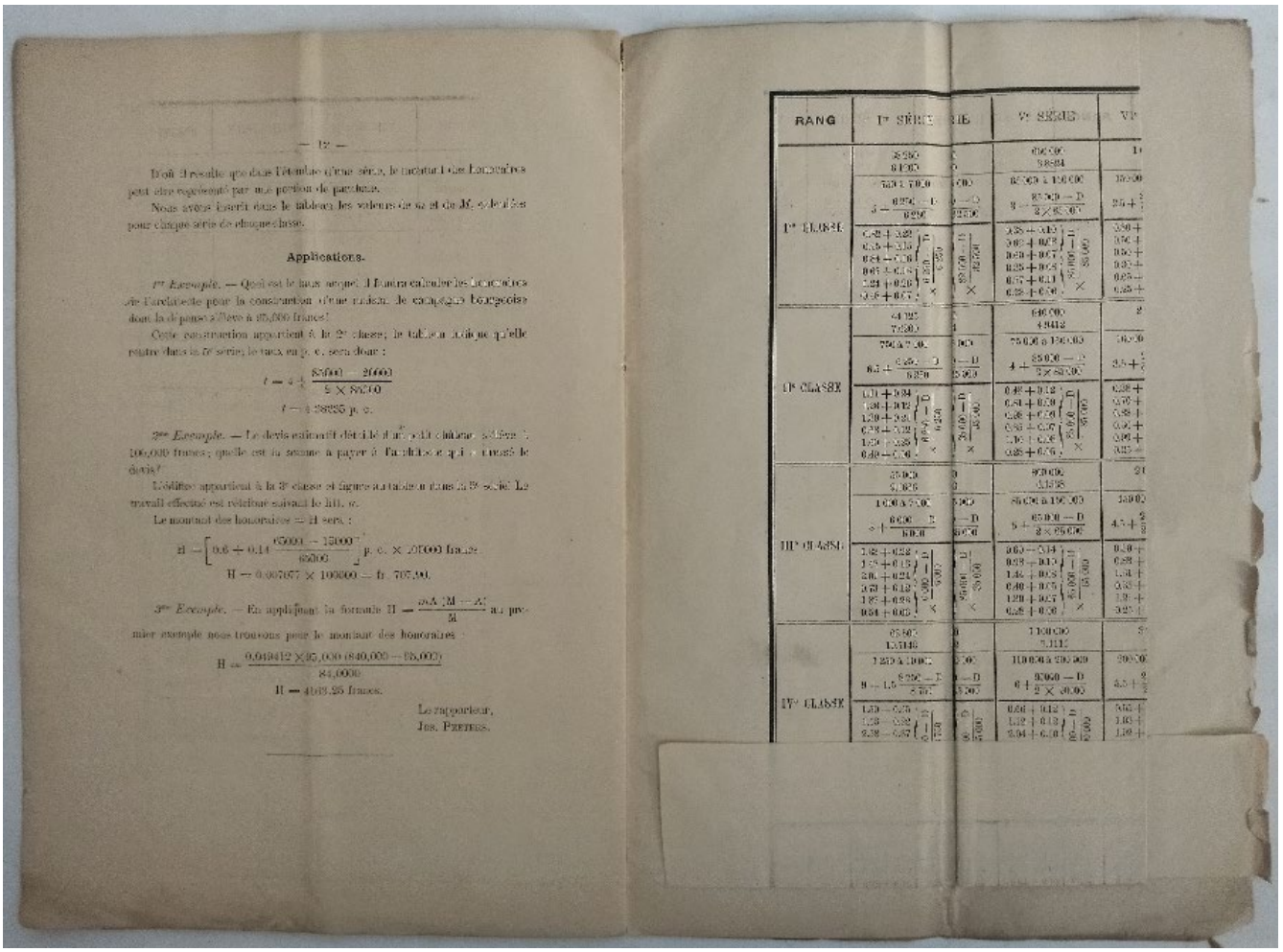


Figure 3. Easily foldable fee overview and calculation examples, Société Centrale d'Architecture en Belgique (1898)

As a first step, the Committee published its own set of pay scales which started at five percent, and could go up to ten percent in case of complex design commissions. The center of gravity, moreover, shifted away from on-site supervision and towards the early, design-oriented stages of the process. As Pierre Devos (Devos 1921, 89), long-time president of the Committee, wrote in an opinion piece in *L'Emulation,* the arguments behind such changes were twofold. On the one hand, he argued that the Belgian context implied a larger workload than the French, where the architect was "supported by contractors and suppliers molded by tradition and especially well-organized." On the other, Devos slyly remarked how the quality of French architects was "in proportion to the monetary return of their labor". The genuine yet convenient argument for adjusted pay scales was thus that a higher remuneration of creative labor would lead to improved designs, and more beautiful, sanitary public spaces. The *Société* launched a first issue of these pay scales entitled "Tableau des Honoraires de l'Architecte" in 1898, which came with an easily foldable overview and multiple calculation examples. This, of course, genuinely helped the reader, but the accessibility and clarity of the text also conveniently served to allow these pay scales to be considered as a proper alternative custom more quickly. Moreover, the *Comité de Défense Juridique* repeatedly republished updated versions, later called "Barème des Honoraires", first in 1905, and after the First World War even roughly every five years. This allegedly made sure that the fees followed recent changes in economy and inflation, but since all fees except a few fixed prices were calculated in percentages, it seems likely that renewed outreach and confirmation of their own "usage" was an additional underlying motive.

The end of WWI marked a watershed in the success of the *Société*'s efforts, as the demands for architects soared due to the Belgian reconstruction campaign. The bargaining position for architects fundamentally altered, and these conditions likely provided an ideal breeding ground for new legal pay scale customs to take root. Although we have not yet been able to verify this, Pierre Devos (1921, 90) indicated in his article on "Honorariums for Architects" that "different ministry departments and public administrations" already applied the "Barème" of the *Société* three years after the war. Moreover, annexed to his article was the verbatim report of a court decision by the Brussels first tribunal, which, for the first time after the war, referred to the "Barème" as the legal custom. From then on, *L'Emulation* repeatedly reprinted court cases on contractual disputes that reconfirmed their pay scales, while criticizing other court decisions as backwards and immoral when these had rejected the "Barème". Slowly but steadily, the pay scale of the *Société* circulated outside of the courtrooms and beyond *L'Emulation.* Not only did multiple architectural offices explicitly endorsed the pay scale as their standard fee in correspondence with clients, as becomes clear from their preprinted letterheads. Many other periodicals also started torefer to the "Barème", again reconfirming its new status as "usage". In its Q&A, for instance, *Bouwkroniek* often received questions from readers

who disputed or doubted how much they were to pay their architects. The magazine's in-house lawyers consistently pointed to the "Barème" as the reigning pay scale, sometimes explicitly referring to the French law as "outdated" (Terneus 1924, 8).

By the 1930s, the S*ociété Centrale d'Architecture de Belgique* had, through cunning legal expertise and well-directed publication strategies, succeeded in truly establishing its own fees as the widely accepted benchmark and payment practice in Belgium's construction sector. As such, these strategies reveal the important agency of professional press in coproducing construction law. And yet, as the next section reveals, the case of the *Comité de Défense Juridique* also highlights how the role of magazines and their professional, commercial, or sectorial organizations could even go beyond informing and shaping law, by claiming the opportunities that juridification and the growing legal market were starting to offer.

3. Claiming construction law

Juridification is an "ambiguous term", as law theoreticians and political scientists Lars Blichner and Anders Molander (2008, 36) note. While most authors understand it as the "bureaucratization" and even "legal polution" of society across multiple domains (Teubner 1987, 3), such processes of legal proliferation automatically entail considerable byproducts and additional dynamics. One of these is that as regulations become more numerous and detailed, legislation often becomes less transparent for a lay audience.

As the body of (construction) law burgeoned and became more complex, a growing legal market thus emerged which offered important opportunities to capitalize on one's ability to interpret, explain, and strategically use, the often daunting amount of new regulations in court. Legal historians have thus also critically studied how juridification brings about "increased judicial power" or the "monopolization of the legal field by legal professionals" (Blichner and Molander 2008, 45; Brooker 1999, 1).

Browsing through the three periodicals does confirm that such dynamics were at play during the interbellum in the Belgian construction sector. As building regulations became increasingly dense and complex, various external lawyers entered the construction scene. Not only did they undoubtedly earn an income through their contributions and personalized answers to reader's questions, these periodicals likely also served as convenient publicity, and this precisely to the clientele these construction law experts sought to reach. With complicating legislation and soaring demands in the building sector, already having their name printed out may have meant a crucial boost to their law firm. In some cases, however, such publicity was even more explicit. At the same time André Rodenbach was starting to write in *Bouwkroniek*, he also (co-)authored a series of doctrinal reference works, entitled *Welk is mijn Recht,* or "What are my Rights" (Rodenbach and Rubbens 1931; Rodenbach 1933; 1934). As the Dutch subtitle of its first issue indicates, the series consisted of "an array of questions and answers", first on "the most practical law cases regarding easements", later on the "responsibilities of contractors towards owners" and "architects". As such, the format and content of these publications not only seems specifically based on the Q&A section of *Bouwkroniek*, the periodical also explicitly started advertising the book in its legal rubric, and even included discount vouchers for its readers. In similar vein, *L'Emulation* (Devos 1923) equally advertised *Droits et Obligations de l'Architecte*, the most famous work of resident lawyer Delvaux (1923, VIII). The preface of the book was written by Henri Botson, by stating that while numerous architects were "in complete ignorance of their obligations and rights", lawyers and the book were there to supplement this "absence of education".

While this reads as a deliberate claim to the legal construction market, monopolization by legal experts was not the only dynamic at play within the growing market of construction law. That architect Pierre Devos (1923) strategically celebrated how Delvaux' book recommended and lauded the *Société*'s "Barème" already indicates that the professional press did not just passively watch from the sidelines how legal experts were monopolizing these new opportunities. The *Comité de Défense Juridique* of the *Société* effectively developed many of the same services that lawyers offered to their clientele, and it used *L'Emulation* as a way to publicize these activities. The core of the Committee was comprised of a team of architects specialized in building law, who were often active as judicial building experts, and who offered extensive legal assistance to the magazine's subscribers. Readers would write about a particular dispute with clients, or pose questions regarding local planning regulations, often annexing additional documents such as the contract, building permits or plans, to which the Committee would offer tailor-made legal advice. Sometimes, when correspondents were going to court, legal aid would go even further. For such members—examples include architects charging the state from withdrawing from public tenders, client-architect disputes, as well as plagiarism cases—the Committee often decided to cover their legal expenses, including the hiring of a lawyer, for which they often used their network to engage resident specialists such as Delvaux or Botson, possibly against reduced fees. Lastly, as becomes clear from in-depth research of the archives of the *Comité de Défense Juridique* of the *Société*, the organization also set up the possibility for independent professional settlement (A&BA). On the one hand, it offered in-house arbitration. Both parties of the dispute then signed an agreement that unequivocally accepted the decision of an independent arbitrator who could be an architect, engineer or lawyer, depending on the requirements of the case. On the other hand, it was one of the founding organizations of the "Brussels Chamber of Conciliation and Arbitrage for Construction", an organization established in 1919 and presided by architect Paul Le Clerc. Throughout the interbellum, the *Comité de Défense Juridique* would hold three delegate seats, to which it sent many of its most esteemed members, including Gustave Maukels and Pierre Devos. The *Société* also explicitly advertised this Chamber as a solution to the often sluggish and costly regular legal courts. As stated in *L'Emulation* (1932, 255), settlement allowed the disputing parties to avoid "the complex and onerous formalities as well as the delays of the ordinary procedure." Such arbitration certainly was of genuine interest to a vast number of actors in the construction sector. Nevertheless, this process also conveniently meant the *Société* increased its grip on the way legal building disputes were settled, and that an increasing number of architects, either as expert or arbitrator, reaped the benefits of the emerging legal market.

Conclusion

The turn of the century marked a watershed for juridification within the Belgian construction sector. Where building in Belgium knew limited regulation before, the interbellum saw a true "proliferation of law". As most architects, engineers, contractors, and many other building actors had little to no legal schooling, the communication of this increasingly complex legislation became vital for the sector as a whole. This paper explored the crucial yet understudied role professional periodicals played in the dissemination of such legal knowledge to the various actors across the building sector. However, by combining the conventional perspective of construction history with a lens of legal history, we highlighted that the role of the professional press went beyond mere communication: even though the editorial boards were often comprised of anonymous figures that are hard to trace, these actors were part of, and represented, particular commercial, professional, or sectorial organizations. These developed their own legal building expertise, and used these periodicals not only to inform, but also as influential mouthpieces to coproduce construction law, and claim the new opportunities created by the sector's emerging legal market.

In a direct response to John Summerson's (1985, 1) seminal question "What is the history of construction?", Malcolm Dunkeld (1987, 12–13) argued in his equally seminal text that the future of the field lies in avoiding to be "committed to a single methodology", and in remaining "open to […] many other disciplines". While our paper sought to surface understudied legal dynamics at play the Belgian interwar construction sector, it simultaneously aims to reconfirm Dunkeld's words, and highlights the enormous potential of an interdisciplinary approach to construction history.

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Figure 3. Easily foldable fee overview and calculation examples, Société Centrale d'Architecture en Belgique (1898)

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